

THE WINDOW

VICTORY THROUGH AIR POWER?

From Switzerland we have received the following review of a book which has aroused much interest in America.—K. M.

IN 1930 the most famous theoretician of air warfare, the Italian General Giulio Douhet, died in Rome at the age of sixty-one. During the Great War he was an officer of the Italian General Staff. For his criticism of Italy's conduct of the war he was condemned to one year's imprisonment. Later this punishment was rescinded. In 1921 he was made a general. In the same year he published his famous book on air domination, *Dominio dell'Aria*. He followed up his book with many articles in the *Rivista Aeronautica*, General Balbo's magazine, in which he continued to fight for his ideas. Douhet was a fanatic who frequently disregarded technical questions. His writings caused endless discussions which contributed much toward the clarification of the problems of air warfare. Indeed, these discussions did not cease even after his death.

Recently a book appeared in the United States which attempts to utilize the experiences gained so far in the present war and which propounds ideas that in many respects are strongly reminiscent of Douhet's *Dominio dell'Aria*. The book is entitled *Victory Through Air Power*, and the interest it aroused from the very beginning seems to be growing steadily.

Its author is Alexander Seversky, who has a reputation of long standing among aeronautical experts. He was born in Russia in 1894. In 1914 he became a lieutenant in the Russian Navy, and after having served some time with a destroyer flotilla he went over to the naval air arm. As a pursuit and fighter pilot he came through many successful battles. Because of his technical knowledge and ability he was then sent to the United States with the Russian naval and air mission. While he was active in this capacity, the Tsarist Empire collapsed. He remained in the States where he participated in the development of the American air arm in various important official posi-

tions, finally acquiring the rank of an American major. In 1931 he founded the Seversky Aircraft Corporation (the forerunner of the present Republic Aviation Corporation), which produced some of the best American pursuit planes.

THE EUROPEAN KALEIDOSCOPE

In his book he tells us about his experiences in Europe shortly before the present war, when he visited various countries to negotiate the delivery of American planes. He describes the impressive size and the excellent organization of the German air force and aviation industry. He claims that the German aircraft models were already fixed in their design some years before the war in order to permit unlimited mass production. Prewar conditions in France are revealed in all their glaring inefficiency. He describes the prejudices against which he as a foreign industrialist had to fight there, and the corruption which he encountered at every step, from the highest to the lowest. He describes how the results of official tests were tampered with and forged till the desired result was arrived at and the foreign plane appeared inferior to the French one. He describes the disorder and maladministration in the various factories as well as in the entire industry. In contrast to this, he has more favorable things to say about the British aircraft industry and the spirit permeating it before the war; but there, too, he points to various deficiencies which he discovered. He regards the aeronautical industry of America, with which he should be thoroughly familiar, through very critical eyes; and some of the accusations he brings against the leading circles of the United States are of a serious nature.

ELEVEN PRINCIPLES

The essence of his book is contained in the sixth chapter, in which he draws up

eleven principles which he claims to be the lessons to be learned from the present war and which he proves by examples.

The axiom of modern warfare, he states, is that no military actions are possible, either on land or at sea, until air supremacy has been won. As examples he takes the campaign in Norway, then Dunkirk, and the transfer of the three German warships *Scharnhorst*, *Prinz Eugen*, and *Gneisenau* from the port of Brest in February 1942. Pointing to the fact that Great Britain, with her vastly superior fleet, has not yet been able to risk an attack on those coasts of the European continent which are defended by the German air force, he maintains that the navies have lost in importance as means of strategic offensives. He also states that air power cannot be defeated by any other weapon and that it must be overcome from the air, antiaircraft defense being only a palliative.

One contention which will be opposed by many is contained in the sixth principle, namely, that the effective range of the air force must cover the whole extent of the theater of war. In this connection he also raises the demand for special means of transport and supply for the air force, more particularly for such means as correspond to its mobility and speed, i.e., transport planes, which could carry the entire supplies for the air formations at the front.

In another important section he demands that aircraft models be so specialized that they correspond specifically to the requirements of a planned campaign.

Seversky also champions the theory that nowadays air blockade is not only more useful than naval blockade: it is the only effective type of blockade. This would become apparent as soon as the range of action of airplanes had been increased sufficiently.

CAN THEY TAKE IT?

As regards the question which is now so much under discussion, namely, whether civilian morale can be broken by bombing raids on residential and economic centers, he limits himself to stating that the indiscriminate bombing of whole city districts is without value. He believes that the desired effect may, if at all, be achieved only by cutting off vital supplies through the destruction of power plants, gas works, and water works. In this he differs considerably

from Douhet, who had assumed that large-scale indiscriminate bombing attacks on populated centers would suffice to break an enemy country's will of resistance and bring about the collapse of its army.

Today neither one nor the other has been proved right. Only one thing is clear: that a civilian population which has been properly instructed and which has been imbued with a strong will of resistance does not succumb so easily to air raids. This is shown by the experiences of the Allies with their terror raids on European cities.

Seversky agrees with Douhet in that the air force is able to bring about the decision; consequently the army and navy should be given minor tasks in comparison to the air force. Incidentally, his presentation is more entertaining than Douhet's writings, as he is in a position to give countless examples from the last few years for his theories. But although Seversky's book contains many interesting ideas worth discussing, it does not represent an actual theory of air warfare. With these limitations it may be permissible to call Seversky a successor to Douhet.

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His practical significance, however, is to be found elsewhere. On the basis of his theories he stipulates that the United States should have a fleet of huge bombers which can reach any point of the globe within a radius of 8,000 kilometers. This would make it possible to carry out raids from Newfoundland as far as Poland, from New York as far as Le Havre, from Hawaii all over Japan, and from Algiers as far as the northern coast of Finland. This, according to his opinion, would make it possible to bring about a decision in the war by heavy raids on the industrial and military establishments of the enemy.

It is by no means impossible that his book may give a renewed impulse to those circles in the United States which have been emphasizing the superiority of the air force over the navy and army. Thus it is quite feasible that Seversky may influence the present air policy of the United States and even that of the whole Anglo-Saxon group of powers. It will be interesting to observe how Seversky's theories stand up against the practical application of new theories on air warfare which have undoubtedly been developed in the Axis countries during the five years to have elapsed since Seversky's last visit to Europe.—G. U.